

Sussex Tech Teacher is Delaware State Teacher of the Year for 2013

John Sell becomes Delaware's nominee in national competition

John Sell, an English teacher at Sussex Technical High School, is Delaware's State Teacher of the Year for 2013. Sell has more than 21 years of teaching experience, the last 11 of which have been in the Sussex Technical School District in Georgetown.

Governor Jack Markell announced Sell as the 2013 Delaware Teacher of the Year in front of more than 475 invited guests at the Dover Downs Hotel and Conference Center in Dover tonight.

D.J. Forcucci, an English content specialist at Sussex Tech, called Sell a naturally gifted teacher in a letter to the Teacher of the Year Selection Committee.

"It isn't about his content knowledge, although he could quote any poem written in the last two centuries, and it isn't about his pedagogy, although he memorized the Common Core standards in a day," Forcucci said. "It is about his innate charisma. It is about his ability to connect with students so naturally and on so many levels that they seek him out on the days they don't have him just to say hi.

"It is about his ability to make students run to his class and audibly moan in disappointment outside his door on the rare occasion that there is a substitute in the room. And it is about his ability to make his students and his peers better through their experiences with him," Forcucci said.

Sussex Tech senior Victoria Hearn is one of those students.

"I must admit that my interests lie in math and science ... however, I found myself excited to go to English class because of Mr. Sell," she wrote. "Mr. Sell not only made me a better writer, he made me want to be a better writer."

Noted by his colleagues for his use of technology to connect with students and parents, Sell was the first teacher in his school to use online instructional activities and assessments in his daily instruction. He uploaded all of his course materials for student access in and out of school. He also is a lead teacher outside the classroom, serving as an original member of his school's teacher leadership academy, a mentor for Sussex Tech's new teacher program and a leader of a professional learning community (shared planning time for teachers).

Simply put, John is a multiplier," Principal Jenn Demby told the committee. "He has an innate ability to elevate the level of professionalism and performance of all in his presence. He is a team player [who] supports students, parents and teachers and tends not to draw the spotlight on his efforts."

Sell, who earned a Bachelor of Science in English education from Indiana University of Pennsylvania and a Master of Arts in curriculum and instruction from Delaware State University, is completing a doctorate in educational leadership from Northcentral University.

He described his teaching philosophy as centering around two essential components: "making learning enjoyable and making the curriculum accessible 24 hours a day.

"Being able to help students laugh and enjoy the learning process is key to helping them become lifelong learners who will not see reading or writing or studying as tedious tasks and hurdles, but rather as entertaining endeavors that can unlock a treasure trove of opportunities for a better and more fulfilling life," Sell said.

The demanding process of selecting Delaware's Teacher of the Year is designed to find that teacher who is most representative of the entire profession through in-class observations, portfolio reviews and consideration of finalists by a representative panel.



Sell now inherits from outgoing Teacher of the Year Amber Augustus the responsibility of representing all teachers in Delaware. He will address community groups, business leaders, legislators, and educational organizations to inform the public about the status of Delaware schools. He also will become Delaware's entrant in the National Teacher of the Year Program. Sponsored by Target, it is a project of the Council of Chief State School Officers in partnership with the ING Foundation, Phoenix and People to People Ambassador Programs.

By action of the General Assembly, Sell will receive a \$5,000 grant to use for the educational benefit of his students, as well two personal grants totaling an additional \$5,000. The remaining 18 school district candidates will each receive a personal grant of \$2,000.

Sell also will receive an educational technology package valued at approximately \$18,000 from the SMART Technologies, ULC. Additionally, he will receive: a \$1,000 grant for educational/classroom use from American Institutes for Research; grants from the Delaware State Education Association, the Delaware State Chamber of Commerce and the Delaware Professional Standards Board; a State of Delaware Teacher of the Year commemorative plate from the Division of Motor Vehicles; free graduate-level courses from Delaware's higher education institutions, including a full doctorate program from Wilmington University; a gold watch from the Delaware State Teachers of the Year Association; a 10-karat gold ring from Jostens; and lunch in Washington D.C. with Sen.

Tom Carper.

Other organizations that honored the newly-selected Teacher of the Year include: the Delaware Chief School Officers Association, Delaware Association of School Administrators, Delaware School Boards Association, University of Delaware, Delaware State University, Wesley College, Delaware Technical and Community College Owens Campus and the Future Educators of America.

Sell's selection as Delaware's top educator makes him the 49th Teacher of the Year since Delaware's recognition program began in 1965. This year's celebration was sponsored in part by ING Foundation.